

from the editor

# Spring Cleaning

When we clear our clutter, we make space for what really matters.

**T**WICE A YEAR, my husband and I embark on the Great Schlep. Every spring, we pack up our stuff, lug the boxes to the storage unit, and move from our spacious winter rental into a two-room cabin. Every fall, we drag the boxes back out, knowing full well we'll have to pack everything up again the following summer.

What is all this stuff? Aside from essentials like warm winter gear and gardening tools, there are a few treasures: a couple of photo albums, a huge blue potluck bowl made by a beloved friend, a few cherished books and CDs, the soup pot, a favorite sweater. Although the rest of it is mostly baggage, I can't seem to part with it. Nor do I ever find time to sort it out, to "go through it," so to speak.

I could say the same of my mental baggage. Along with the few treasures and necessities, I carry a head full of useless beliefs, a secret stash of negativity. The notion that I'm not "good enough," for instance, no longer fits; it's too small. But I cart it around like a pair of lime-green hip-huggers I'd never even want to squeeze back into. My worn-out frets and worries accumulate until my heart sags under the weight.

So why do I cling to my clutter, inside and out? It's safe. Immobilized by clutter, I never have to decide, to make hard or scary choices, about what I want—and don't want—in my life, whether it's an object, a relationship, or an attitude.

The essential tasks, however, have a way of resurfacing no matter how full I pack my life. They can take the most

innocuous forms. A clutter-clearing book that has been circulating among friends recently came to me at a party. I tucked it inside a picnic cooler so I wouldn't lose it, and then forgot the cooler. It sat there a week. When I brought the book home, I lost it.

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Last weekend while I was looking for something else, I started a small avalanche of books and magazines tumbling from a shelf onto the sofa. Underneath it all was the clutter-clearing book. Reluctantly, I opened it. "Start with something small," it said, "a drawer or a shelf." I chucked the catalogs (well, all but one) into the recycling bin and did the same with all of the magazines—except the two I must read.

Clearing that little shelf heartens me. The boxes are next. I'd be lying if I said I'm looking forward to tackling them, but it's time to start going through my things. I'm tired of tripping over the junk that gets in my way, and I

don't want to cart it around forever.

In going through my stuff, I want to unearth some answers to this question: what is the "good life," and what do we need to live it? What do I really want? Already, as I start sifting in my mind, I see that most of what I need to thrive can't be contained in a box, anyway: A loving life at home. Closeness with family and friends. A chance to give something of myself. Meaningful work. Clean air and water. Wildness. Celebration. Solitude.

I struggle to make room for these treasures because my internal clutter is forever threatening to crowd them out of my life. There's my messy heap of guilty "shoulds," a musty box of rattling fears, a tangle of self-doubts worn through at the knees. I need to touch each one of these, bring them to the light to see them for that they really are: a bunch of useless junk. I've got some cave cleaning to do, as a friend says, and now's the season.

And this summer, my husband and I will move into the house we're building. Before we settle in, we're planning to hold a major yard sale. The deals will be great because we're releasing all the stuff we no longer need, which is most of it. In all ways, I want to enter our new home carrying as little as possible. That way my arms and heart will be free for whatever comes next. ▲



Kimberly Ridley

## POWER PLAYS

# A Green SUV

TIRED OF YOUR FORD Explorer's 17 miles per gallon? How does a 99-mile-per-gallon SUV sound—with better crash safety and a larger payload? Then your next automobile should be a Hypercar, powered by a hydrogen fuel cell.

Running far more efficiently than today's hybrid cars, the Hypercar could transform the traditional ways of both designing and building an automobile. It's the brainchild of Amory Lovins of the Rocky Mountain Institute, and all of the technologies required to produce it are already in use. Incorporated in 1998, Hypercar, Inc. boasts an advisory board that includes design, research, and engineering experts from Ford, Fiat, and General Motors.

Okay, maybe the Hypercar won't be your next car, but it's on the way. The company is going head-to-head-gasket in the marketplace as early as 2005, licensing its design and manufacturing process to established automakers. That's when industry experts project that fuel-cell technology, which uses hydrogen to produce electricity, will begin to compete economically with gasoline-fired engines. The fuel-cell emissions: water.

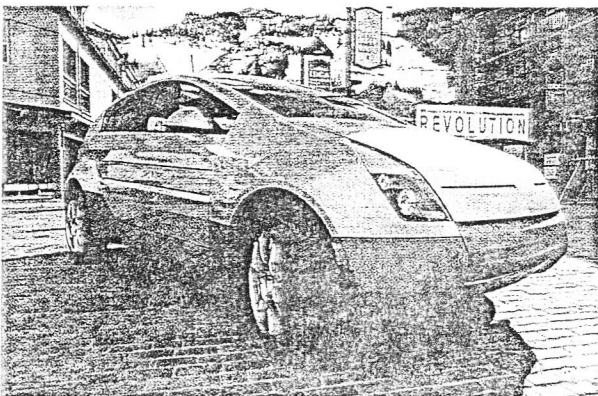
This augurs a revolutionary shift—which is why Hypercar named its prototype the Revolution. Carbon dioxide emissions from American autos could drop by two thirds, and other alternative uses of fuel cells will become viable. Imagine, for instance, electrifying your house with your car at night! Or selling power back to the grid.

"Hypercars could enter production in five years, dominate the market in ten, and the old way of making cars could be toast in about twenty years," Lovins told the Associated Press last fall. *Vive le revolution!*

—Todd R. Nelson

## MORE INFORMATION

[www.hypercar.com](http://www.hypercar.com)



The Hypercar Revolution is designed to achieve the equivalent of ninety-nine miles per gallon by using a lighter, aerodynamically sophisticated body and an electric motor powered by a hydrogen fuel cell.



*A great way to get clear on what's important is talk over tea, which Jamien Morehouse invited friends to do each vernal equinox. Today her tradition continues.*

## TRY THIS AT HOME

# Tea for Two...Million?

IN 1986 JAMIEN MOREHOUSE invited a hundred women to join her for tea on the vernal equinox. She sent them each two tea bags and asked them to sit and sip with another friend at 4 p.m. on March 20—"to commit ourselves to a springtime of rejuvenation and good humor, and a lifetime of peace...."

"The notion wasn't that people had to get together physically," says longtime friend Mary Amory, "but that they would gather simultaneously across time and space."

The tea became an annual rite. Although Morehouse died of cancer in 1999, her tea tradition continues, spreading quietly. For friends, it's a time to honor her way of "living deliberately"; for strangers at the Women's Fund of New Hampshire last spring, "It was a wonderful metaphor for women sitting quietly together, creating community, and enhancing the larger community," says the fund's Executive Director Martha Cunningham.

Jamien Morehouse was an artist, wife, mother of four sons, and community activist extraordinaire in Rockport, Maine. She seized upon any chance to build community or to create abundance from waste, giving friends mittens, for instance, that she'd knit from recycled Salvation Army sweaters. In 1991 a Russian herring-processing vessel anchored in Penobscot Bay, and the U.S. Coast Guard forbade the men on board to come ashore—but Morehouse wanted to send a more welcoming message. She asked friends and church groups to bake pies and delivered dozens to the crew.

"I believe that some of the world's greatest problems have been solved by women sitting at kitchen tables drinking tea," Morehouse wrote to an ever-widening circle in March 1993, seven years after her first tea invitation. "[T]he skills of keepers of homes and nurturers of children are the skills which will ultimately bring a sense of love and caring to the world. Women's priorities are global priorities."

At 4 p.m. on the first day of spring, Wednesday, March 20, Hope's staff will step away from the afternoon's busy-ness and take a cup of tea in the spirit suggested by Jamien Morehouse. Will you join us? Please, and do bring a friend! —LF

# Rolling Back My Stone

**Sometimes it takes someone with nothing to teach the true nature of giving.**

*by Alexander Chee*

I BEGAN COOKING for the homeless because I was angry at them.

I'd been living in New York for six years, working as a waiter, a freelance writer, and a writing teacher while I wrote my novel. That meant: Serving steaks and scotches to businessmen at high speed, either in the middle of the day or late into the night, or both. Writing anything people would let me put into print, such as articles about plant theft and the carving of a turkey. And teaching people who wondered why I was teaching writing if I hadn't yet managed to publish a book. I wrote in the few hours left, sometimes on my waiter pad and often on the F train, which carried me between work and my apartment in Park Slope.

The trains were where I saw the homeless the most. I would watch them on the platform or pushing through the crowded trains, looking angry sometimes, dejected others. The sight of one guy I passed every day haunted me; the bare stumps of his legs sticking off his wheelchair were a rebuke to my resentment. But still it grew: I resented the horrible smell of someone who hadn't washed for weeks greeting me as I boarded the train, like a very old smelly sneaker pressed suddenly into my face. I hated the urine pooled under a bench, running toward my shoe when the train moved along. And I felt hostile when, after working every hour of the day and night, I would see someone holding a cup out, looking angry at me for withholding my "spare" change. Add to this my resentment toward the City of New York, the state, and the federal government, for taking a third of my earnings to serve up policies that put these people on my train, too often ill, untreated, and without

prospects. Clearly I was lost on the issue and disliked myself, to boot, for the stinginess and anger that, after all my defensiveness, I knew were wrong.

In February 2000 I'd begun attending a Unitarian Universalist church, where they asked me to believe not in the miracles of Christ as much as the ethical teachings of Bible stories. "Don't be in church if you can feed the homeless," was how it was put to me. And so I decided to cook off my anger at Monday Night Hospitality for the Homeless at All Soul's Church. If I could run steaks for the rich, I told myself, I'd run meatloaf for the poor. I cleaned the fridge that first Monday and, after two months, was entrusted with the shopping and menu planning. Then a cook left to start a family, and I stepped in.

While I was proud of the responsibility, amazingly, my anger had deepened—but, I began to understand it was not at the homeless so much as at my life in New York City. By April, my six years of work and sacrifice had brought me this fruit: twenty-three rejection letters. With the last one, my agent at the time sent a column from the *New York Times* about how people weren't buying gay fiction, publishers or readers, and she asked me to withdraw the book from consideration. She also asked me to move forward with writing my next novel, which wouldn't, that I could yet see, have any gay characters. *Be yourself, but don't* was the message of it all. In the light of this, my whole life began to feel wrong, as if every step had been a misstep. As everything else I'd been certain of fell on failure, I mistrusted the pride I felt in my new responsibility, as if even that would prove somehow faulty.



Easter came. I went to church and prayed to know: was my work to create an audience, my attempt to be a gay writer on my terms, even the fact of being gay—was all this really wrong? “Roll back the stone,” the minister said that morning, speaking of the stone rolled back from Jesus’ tomb. “In your life, roll back the stone.”

*Sure, I thought as I sat there, resigned. I’ll get right on that. I’ll get this stone right off my heart.*

The next day, I returned to the church to cook dinner. Each Monday we fed seventy-two people, our seating capacity, and we had to do it with just \$150. I don’t remember what I made, except that I had to beat instant mashed potatoes by hand (we couldn’t afford a beater), enough for 144 portions so that we could serve seconds. As I whipped the potatoes, no one seemed to know how to do one thing that night. The sound of my name interrupted me endlessly: “Alex, is this...?” “Alex, is that...?” “Alex...” “Alex...” Outside, a few people were saying unkind things about the food. In the stainless steel kitchen, I was sweating, alternating between extremes of anger and sadness. If I wasn’t any good as a writer, I wanted at least to have this go right. But even that desire felt suspect, not the point of feeding the homeless. *What’s wrong with me?* I asked, walking out of the kitchen, needing a break from the confused volunteers.

As I stepped into the dining room, I overheard a volunteer saying to another, “Yeah, she tried to give me an egg, too. Ick. No idea where that’s from!” As they laughed, I felt ashamed of being one of them.

I came upon a homeless woman the senior volunteers called Crazy Marge, although I am still not sure why. Marge is German, a stout-bodied redhead going white.



“Offering,” ©2000 Rosanna Olson

She keeps her hair up in a loose bun underneath a hat of some kind, varying with the season, and wears house dresses, orthopedic shoes and, often, white hose. That evening, I knew her only as an exemplar of plate scraping, someone who occasionally helped us clean up the dining room and who always took food for women who couldn’t leave the shelter because of their children. I could see that there was a time when she had had a kitchen and a home and was proud of the way she kept both.

Marge stood in front of me. “Cook?” she asked. “Yes,” I said.

“Can I give you something?” She smiled and rocked forward and back on her heels, like a girl, holding the edges of her dress, one arm behind her.

“Sure,” I said, thinking I knew what was next. I could see how she just wanted the chance to give something, to receive the feeling of giving something. She pulled a pink-dyed egg from behind her back, and it glowed there in her hand.

“For you,” she said. “Happy Easter, Cook.”

There it was: my stone. She’d made it light enough for

me to hold in my hand. I almost burst out laughing as I took it from her. As I looked at it and rolled its weight in my palm, I felt the hard part of me begin to break up. I didn't ask where the egg was from; that seemed to miss the point of it. Instead, I said, "Thank you."

"Thank you, for cooking. It was wonderful," she said. I thought of the instant potatoes and wondered if this was why she was called crazy: she wasn't afraid to be grateful, even now.

"You're welcome," I said, smiling, and walked back to the kitchen to place the egg in my bag. I could still feel the hardness inside me falling away. I needed to give, she needed to give—everyone needed to give. And everyone needed to let everyone else give. I took the egg home and put it in my garden, where it could be said to have fed a rose.

I DON'T MIND that Marge is still out there in the dining room, two years

later. Some of the volunteers think she should have moved on in life, found a situation, but they know less about her than I do. I don't know her life, just as I

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don't know what her stone is, or how she's going to roll it back one day. She didn't know mine; she just gave, without being asked, without knowing what

would come. She gave in the purest possible way. This, I saw, was how I needed to give back to her and the others in the room.

I have real potatoes these days and a larger budget, along with more responsibility: I chair Monday Night Hospitality now, and we feed 100 people. I left that first agent and last fall published the previously rejected novel. In how Marge showed me that I can't give while wanting gratitude, I also saw that I can't write expecting certain publication, or work in any way expecting just reward. My stone was the heavy weight of how I thought things should be, not nearly as heavy as the way things actually are. Especially for Marge, and everyone like her. Which, in some lights, on an Easter Monday I remember in particular, is like me, and you. ▲

*Alexander Chee is the author of the novel Edinburgh (Welcome Rain, 2001) and a frequent contributor to Hope.*

## good fight

Following the Trail *continued from page 13*

work anymore. You have to work to fix the whole instead."

And in Marblehead at least, that attitude appears to be contagious. "We began as just people talking in a living room," says Ehrlich, who counts her collaborators among her closest friends. "Perhaps even more important than clear victories like Wenham Lake, is that HealthLink changes public awareness. People who never cared before are now thinking about the environment."

### WANT TO LEARN MORE?

**HealthLink**  
4 Sewall St.  
Marblehead, MA 01945  
781-639-8636  
HealthLink@mediaone.net

**Wenham Lake Watershed Association**  
P.O. Box 172  
Beverly, MA 01915  
www.wlwa.org

**Lori Ehrlich**  
781-639-0299  
lale@mediaone.net

### WANT TO DO MORE? Tips from HEALTHLINK on Starting an Activist Group

- Assemble a core group of five to ten people able to commit time and energy. Time commitments could range from one to forty hours a week, but everyone should follow through on promises.
- Try to pull in a diverse group of people: different ages, different backgrounds and skills.
- Choose accessible places to meet.
- Keep the core people well-informed and up-to-date.
- Cultivate your grassroots. Try as a group to make 100 phone calls a week. Send out e-mails.
- Make sure everyone speaks at each meeting. Follow each person's lead in terms of what she or he wants to contribute.
- Be inclusive. Make it clear everyone can come to every meeting.
- Be persistent. Keep telling people the issues again and again. Keep sending your information to newspapers.
- Raise each issue to a global level. Protecting a single cove becomes protecting the oceans. Saving an acre of trees becomes protecting the forests.
- If you want to sustain the group, choose an issue that doesn't end with a specific win. Don't fight a single power plant; fight the principle of pollution.
- Use the power of other groups. Connect with them to get information and increase your network.
- Ask for help. A lot of people don't know they have something to offer until they're asked.
- Take time to have fun with the group. Celebrate life, because that's what you're fighting for. ▲

*Audrey Schulman is the author of the novels The Cage Swimming with Jonah, and A House Named Brazil.*



## Carpe Diem

A reason to celebrate

March  
20


### Spring Equinox

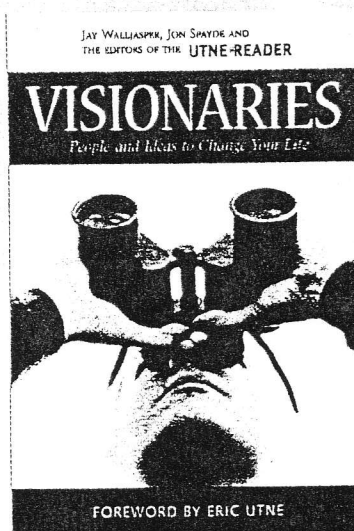
The vernal equinox, when daylight is evenly balanced with darkness for the first time since September, has always been marked as a time of rebirth. And it is widely celebrated with eggs. (Eostre, a Germanic goddess of spring and new life who lent her name to the Christian holiday of rebirth, was honored by the eating of eggs—sometimes brought by a rabbit, according to one legend.) An obvious symbol of spring and fertility, eggs can stand upright (at least in theory) on the date of the equinox, a practice that promised good luck in ancient China. In ancient Persia, Greece, and Rome, and present-day Iran, red eggs are given out to celebrate the arrival of spring, according to urban shaman Donna Henes' newsletter *Always in Season*.

To celebrate either equinox or Easter this year, you might cook up some natural dyes to color eggs. *Wheel of the Year* (Llewellyn, 1992) suggests boiling an onion skin for an orange color, half a teaspoon of turmeric in a small amount water for yellow, beet juice and vinegar for pink, and vinegar and the outer leaves of a red cabbage (left out overnight) for robin's-egg blue.

—Jay Walljasper

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